

## HOMELESSNESS IN NICEVILLE



### **Confidential Instructions for the Shelter Operator, Third Avenue Service Center**

The center is a nongovernmental organization with a \$1 million annual budget. The municipal government contributes \$600,000, and \$400,000 in state funds come directly through the governor's office. The center is located in a downtown area away from residential neighborhoods in Niceville. In your opinion more beds and training programs are necessary. The grant should be used to provide shelter and training through the most efficient means possible, the Third Avenue Service Center.

For thirty years the Third Avenue center has met the needs of Niceville's homeless. You have worked at the center for twenty of those years and have been the director for the past nine years. As a social worker and the administrator of the center you understand the importance of programs and services as well as the politics involved. Criticism of the center is hardly a new phenomenon, but since the publishing of the Homeless Poll, the center has come under increasing attack. You are the first to admit that the center needs more resources. However, the homeless population in Niceville is mainly transient, and though some have been constant residents of the center over the years, most come and go.

The center is able to meet the needs of residents on all except the coldest nights of winter, or on those occasions when a particularly large number of homeless are in town. The center is filled to capacity fifty nights a year and is over capacity ten to fifteen nights a year. Based on your personal experience, expanding the capacity by twenty extra beds is a good idea, although ten would probably suffice. Though job training is an important long-term goal, expansion is necessary to meet the demand for emergency services. The renovation of the building is not a priority in its own right; however, you recognize that the Homeowners Association could be an ally if you went this route.

You have proposed two different projects for the grant money. You should pursue both, but in the end you will use the one that is most acceptable to the group. Most of the parties at the table do not adequately value the center and are willing to exclude it from receiving grant funds. You must assert the center's central role in providing services to the homeless.

The center could use funds to expand current operations and to renovate. The center is very efficient in terms of beds per night per dollar. The center is underfunded, so there is also a need for maintenance and upkeep. Budgets that have not kept up with increasing demands are the



reason for the increasing visibility of homeless in town. The center currently has one hundred beds and can be expanded at a cost of \$10,000 per bed (up to twenty beds). Renovations of the building, which are important to keep neighbors happy, would cost \$200,000.

A second proposal focuses on using the grant as seed money for a new initiative to develop a self-sustaining food-service training program. The center currently has very limited facilities to prepare food for residents. A food-service training program would not only make food available to inhabitants of the center, but it would also train the homeless for jobs in the community. The cost of this program would be \$300,000 for equipment and \$200,000 a year for operating costs.

The center has received donations for blankets and Thanksgiving turkeys from the Ledbetter Foundation in the past and is skeptical of one-time donations. However, this is an opportunity to prove that the center is the most important homeless service in town. The Homeless Union does not represent the entire homeless population. Empowering the mentally ill and substance abusers can be dangerous, as many are chronically dysfunctional. The Community Service League means well, but it is inexperienced. The center needs to do more to include the League in its operations. The league is also an excellent source of donations, volunteers, and good publicity.